Now, this is a defensible position; perhaps, as Walzer seems to be suggesting, it is the only realistic position: but it is not a position with which modern Western consciences are entirely comfortable, and this discomfort is itself part of our 'shared understandings'. Confronted with this unease, Walzer might answer that universal criteria of justice are simply not to be found. I suspect, however, that in turning his back on universalism he is himself committing the error of which he accuses other philosophers, that of oversimplifying the phenomena. For among the spheres of justice that men have created is surely one that we might call 'the sphere of humanity': the sphere concerned with the basic social good of human dignity, of being treated as an end and not as a means. The principles inherent in this sphere are precisely the universal rights which can be claimed by or on behalf of all human beings.

Walzer might indeed have achieved his aim more effectively if instead of attacking universalist notions of justice he had given them their own niche within his theory. It is far from clear how principles derived from the 'sphere of humanity' should be reconciled with other spheres, notably that of membership; but then, as he himself argues, boundary problems are matters to be settled in the course of political practice. One of his virtues, however, is that what he presents is not a closed system that must be accepted or rejected, but an open-ended theory that could be varied in many ways. It should provide the starting-point for a great deal of fruitful debate.

Delba Winthrop: Tocqueville's Errant Follower

Richard Reeves: *American Journey*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1982, 399 pp., $15.95.

'The damn thing seemed to work!' (p. 95).

Richard Reeves, noted American journalist and editor, has done something all of us wish we had thought to do. On the 150th anniversary of Tocqueville's visit to America, Reeves retraced the famous journey. Like Tocqueville, he wanted 'to see what a great republic is like'. Unlike Tocqueville, he has recorded his observations in a thoroughly American book. *American Journey* reads well, for Reeves has the journalist's eye for an impressive fact and ear for a telling remark, and a knack for astute inference. His conclusions are reassuringly optimistic. Nonetheless, or perhaps because of this very fact, the book is ultimately a disquieting one.

Tocqueville might have envisioned much of the America through which Reeves journeyed in 1981. Following Tocqueville, Reeves began his travels in Newport, Rhode Island. There he discovered that one can now choose among 79 radio stations, eight television channels, six newspapers and 250 magazines. In the black community of Highland Park, Michigan, he saw the windowless high school, styled in 'riot architecture', that abuts a food stamps office and three military recruiting offices. In Saginaw, Michigan, he was told that the federal government threatened to close the squash courts of a local club if they were not modified to provide access for people in wheelchairs. While Catholic parishioners at mass in Green Bay, Wisconsin, were singing 'The Spirit is A'Moving All Over' to the strum of guitars, more than half of all who applied for marriage licences in Cincinnati, Ohio, listed the same home addresses for both parties. When Tocqueville met Harvard's President Quincy, he was given a Harvard course catalogue and a copy of *Town Officer*, explaining the self-governing New England township; when Reeves visited Harvard's President Bok, he was given a catalogue and a copy of a Harvard psychiatrist's *Adaptation to Life*, a study of 'coping'.

Reeves had set out to learn of American democracy: 'what had it become? Did it work? Could it peacefully translate the will of the people into life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for each of those people?' (p. 15). What he found was a nation in which the federal government, especially the courts, had assumed preponderant authority and in which republican institutions were being 'unofficially dismantled'. The core of *American Journey* is the documentation, explanation and evaluation of these phenomena.

Reeves's explanation of the growth of federal power is simple – rather too simple. The cause was inequality, above all, racial inequality (pp. 147, 151, 158, 210, 230, 276, 286, 355–56). 'When representative democracy, the Republic, was deliberately unresponsive, as it was to black Americans, judicial appeals became the politics of the day and the appellate process became the process of governing. There were national answers to local questions, then there were fewer and fewer local questions' (p. 151).

Vignettes in *American Journey* document a racial antipathy of alarming depth. Reeves himself does not dwell on the fearful picture he paints because he prefers to believe that most Americans – 'consensus America' – have now consented to their being forced by the federal government to live up to their rhetorical commitment to equality.

Instead of providing the necessary supplement to democratic institutions of which Tocqueville approved, American courts have supplanted representative institutions. If it cannot be said that the majority rules in America, it can be said that all have more or less 'equal access . . . to the state's power to enforce fairness' (p. 105n.). As Tocqueville anticipated,

politicians are widely held in contempt, especially by the kind of people who might spare them justified contempt by becoming politicians themselves. The contemporary democratic politician who 'cares' and 'listens' cannot elicit respect as can a judge who decides, or governs. American freedom is no longer a freedom of entrepreneurial exuberance, but a 'freedom of appeal' (p. 118). Appeal, which means appeal to ever higher levels of government, centralizes decision-making. A Tocquevillian 'administrative centralization' makes local politics unattractive to local businessmen and civic leaders, and regulation tends to dampen entrepreneurial exuberance itself. Those who do become public officials are soon frustrated by their impotence. Presumably the people who go about exercising their 'freedom of appeal' are not frustrated, because they have learned to look for enforced fairness, not self-government. But if representative government did have any inherent value, its loss would not be too high a price to pay for realization of the American 'value' or 'myth' of equality (p. 354).

Or does Reeves not lament the thwarting of our representative institutions because he believes their dismantling inevitable anyway? Technological advances in communications, in the speed with which information can be disseminated, have 'inevitably changed the techniques of the political process' (p. 244). 'Republican institutions – representative government – [are] not essential to the survival of democracy' because administrative centralization has been accompanied by decentralization of information (pp. 205–6). And 'information is power' (p. 244). As a journalist and editor, Reeves is understandably concerned about the place of the media in contemporary American democracy; and given the importance Tocqueville attached to the press, journalists and 'historians' (analysts of public affairs), one could not say his concern is misplaced. Television especially has made dissemination of information instantaneous and virtually universal. Reeves can even imagine 'an electronic republic', in which two-way television enables citizens to record their opinions on issues of the day in central computers linked to their sets. An elected representative 'would then have the dubious honor and politically dangerous duty of voting [with or against] the recorded will of the majority' (pp. 89–90). If he were to vote with it, representative democracy would have become plebiscitary democracy. He could, of course, vote against it.

More realistically, the media can be said to promote democracy when reporting the news that informs public opinion. On television, demonstrators for one cause or another are 'equal in size' to the elected officials they confront. And confront them is what they do. Television coverage is used to pressure and embarrass, and public statements made in a minute of shared time on the 6 pm news are hardly elements of constructive debate. Reeves is no more dismayed by the substitution of confrontation than of plebiscites for deliberative politics, presumably because he understands both plebiscites and confrontations to be not only inevitable, but somehow more democratic. Even public opinion polling is democratizing, since it reverses the normal flow of opinion down from elites to the masses. Significantly, the one example Reeves gives of an upward flow of opinion, attitudes towards crime and the purpose of punishment, is one in which resultant policies would become much less liberal. Foreign policy, information about which (and interest in) has long been the preserve of 'the closest thing to a governing aristocracy . . . in American democracy' (p. 349), would change drastically if democratized – if for no other reason than that democracies are too clumsy to organize wars (pp. 351–2).

American Journey begins with a survey of the vast quantities of information now available to the typical American, and one major question posed is whether 'information, the truth make[s] men free – or [are] individual thought and freedom of action drowning in tidal waves of facts and ideas' (p. 28). Reeves's answer to this question is not very helpful. He details centralization of newspaper ownership and therefore of editorial policy, and indicates his awareness of the political power implicit in the control of information. He finds no cause to admire newspaper chain magnates for anything but their greed and ambition. He is silent about those who control the increasingly important electronic media. When replacing representative institutions with an electronic republic, how are we to assure ourselves that the new (unaccountable) powers will rule the media 'democratically', either by airing information of all sorts or even by airing information that sustains public sentiment in favour of equality? Leaving this major problem aside, what has information to do with the kind of truth a people needs to govern itself? Reeves contends that what and when we know 'inevitably determines our actions'. Three sentences later he concedes that technology is 'only a tool . . . to make certain ideas the context for the decision making of a government of the people' (pp. 244–5). When Tocqueville praised the American press for its freedom he did so because it provided not 'information', but an opportunity for the expression of all moral and political judgments, including unfashionable and even anti-democratic ones. Few questions concerned him more than that of how – or whether – a democracy makes decisions. Reeves is as unconcerned with this question as with that of the relation of purveyors of information to the public that opines.

The electronic republic is at heart a 'selfish democracy', whose selfish-
ness is reflected as much in its apoliticism as in its politics. As becomes
clear, neither elimination of racial inequality nor technology alone has
been responsible for the growth of the federal government. Today's self-
proclaimed 'libertarian' college students firmly believe that it is the
government who should care for elderly Americans. Indeed, senior citizens
have formed an association of sorts. Unlike the voluntary associations
Tocqueville thought so valuable, theirs is intended not to enable them to
help themselves, but to pressure the federal government to do more for
them. Reeves is confident that the young who now profess to seek
'private solutions' to their problems will eventually turn to the same kind
of 'public' solutions.

Government, laws and regulations have been made to substitute, in-
adequately, Reeves acknowledges, for morality in American society. 'The
old values' are generally believed by Americans to have been destroyed by
'Freud'. Here, and in analysing the religious reaction to 'Freud', Reeves
is at his best. By 'Freud' is meant the nineteenth- and twentieth-century
sciences that teach us 'that people somehow [are] not responsible for
their own behavior, that they [are] somehow controlled by mysterious
forces – unconscious or psychological (or sexual!) forces in the analyses
of Sigmund Freud, and economic imperatives in the analyses of Karl
Marx' (p. 199). Perceptively, Reeves observes: 'The whole idea of the
thing could have been American: it was both democratic and individual-
istic; the answers did not come from a God or anyone else in high office,
the answers were within each of us. What Freud did was to legitimize and,
eventually, institutionalize an emphasis on the individual and self'
(p. 199).

The first effect of Freud and Marx on religion, the source of the old
values, was to replace the Protestant Ethic with 'the social gospel', to
replace the ethic of personal effort and responsibility with the attitude
that only society, not individuals, can be responsible for individual actions.
The religious reaction to the social gospel has itself been characteristically
democratic and individualistic. Fundamentalism is the religion of the 'born
again', of those who have come to hold their faith through a personal
religious experience. Reeves is not overly concerned about the decay of
traditional religion and its values because he is not overly concerned about
the dismantling of republicanism.

Believing that we have successfully made our 'transition from Puritan
Republic to some new kind of selfish democracy' (p. 206), Reeves is
unperturbed by the individualism Tocqueville feared as destructive of
morality and republicanism. The students Reeves met at MIT and
Wellesley exhibited a thorough-going cynicism and apoliticism. They could
not be expected to change the country to suit themselves when they took
over, for they had no intention of taking over. Even for their private
careers they had little ambition, certainly not for excellence and not even
much for wealth. Conversations at Harvard Business School led Reeves to
confirm Tocqueville's prediction that without a passion for intellectual
excellence for its own sake, the very material prosperity preferred over
advances in knowledge would be endangered. Under these circumstances
the American Dream, not to mention America's economic vitality, cannot
be sustained; America needs a continuous supply of immigrants who
believe of America and its possibilities what Americans themselves no
longer care to dream of. What Reeves expects will be the 'great mark on
history' of the United States – a greatness of which he says Tocqueville
thought democracy incapable – will be its 'lead[ing] – and be[ing] led
by – its people to peace [rather] than to war' (p. 352). America's paci-
ficism will be a product not only of democratic ineptitude, but of the
attitude of a Louisville businessman's seventeen-year-old daughter who
'seemed amazed when her father and I said we believed there were things
worth fighting and dying for, and insisted that it would "make no differ-
ence to me" if a foreign enemy were in South Carolina' (p. 346).

Reeves is optimistic that the centralized, informed and selfish democ-
racy America has become not only works, but will continue to be to itself
and to the world an exemplar of equality. He acknowledges, with Tocque-
ville, that there is no effective obstacle to tyranny of the (white) majority
in the United States save that of a proud determination to live up to its
own rhetoric. 'The nature of the American experiment, I was beginning
to think, was the attempt to rise, collectively, above one's self . . . The
ideas of America are indeed bigger and better than Americans . . . Without
the rhetoric, there is no America – at least not the America which we so
proudly hail' (p. 230). One might wonder how Reeves can seriously
expect Americans who find it amazing that anything – even their own
freedom – could be worth fighting for to be moved by rhetoric to sacri-
fice any private interest for America's honour, much less to identify their
self-interest with its honour.

If the damn thing works, Reeves's Americans in fact do little more than
cope with the irresponsible forces they believe govern their lives. Coping
sometimes requires them to treat these forces as if they were gods, exercis-
ing a right of appeal (praying) or angrily protesting (cursing). It is hard to
see how this amounts to a 'peaceful [translation of] the will of the people

into life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for each', or how Reeves can contend in conclusion that such people are at work 'defining greatness' for themselves. In Tocqueville's opinion, democratic nations could achieve the greatness appropriate to them only if great efforts were made to ensure that each citizen remained actively responsible for his own life, liberty and pursuit of happiness and make him see that he could not do so if he cared for nothing but this. Only by cultivating republican political mores could American democracy be made to work. And what it would be working for would be liberty and human dignity.

In retracing Reeves's American journey one comes upon an American phenomenon not anticipated in *Democracy in America*: the kind of contemporary American intellectual Reeves typifies. Tocqueville feared that democratic peoples might be driven by a passion for equality to sacrifice their freedom and prosperity in the name of egalitarianism. Reeves's Americans exhibit no such passion, and his description is probably accurate. Tocqueville anticipated and feared 'democratic historians' (like Marx and vulgarized Freud), who, in their quest for great general causes of all events would deny that individuals can influence human affairs and thereby dissuade them from attempting any action. Reeves's arguments about the effects of communications technology notwithstanding, his book is clearly intended to teach us that we have lost a freedom we (or some of us) once had because we have consented to the triumph of justice at any cost. Tocqueville also knew of American moralists who tried to make a doctrine of 'self-interest properly understood' substitute for private and public virtue. But unlike these moralists, Reeves does not see the necessity of showing that living up to our egalitarian rhetoric is in any individual's interest, or even that any American misunderstands his self-interest. In Europe, but not in America, Tocqueville had seen people who believed that democracy could mean not the self-government of the majority, but the rule of its ardent partisans, who know what is best for the people. *Democracy in America* was written in large part precisely to steal their thunder by giving Europe a portrait of a truly democratic republic that worked tolerably well. America, too, now seems to have such people to contend with.

On the basis of Reeves's findings, it would be unwise to conclude that American democracy is working well today. Given the complacent confusion of *American Journey*, it seems even less wise to look to our democratic intellectuals for consolation or correction. Fortunately, none of us needs a special occasion to retrace on our own Tocqueville's intellectual journey through modern democracy.

Peter Ferdinand: The Secretiveness of China

John H. Fincher: *Chinese Democracy*, London, Croom Helm, 1981, 276 pp., £17.95.

Tony Saich: *China: Politics and Government*, London, Macmillan, 1981, 228 pp., hardback £12.95, paperback £4.95.

John Gardner: *Chinese Politics and the Succession to Mao*, London, Macmillan, 1982, 217 pp., hardback £14.00, paperback £4.95.

The first of these books, that by Fincher, has three aims. The first is to present an account of the development of the self-government movement in China from 1905 to 1914. This was a movement that grew upwards from local and provincial levels in the late Qing period and flourished to an extent and at a speed that no one at the time expected. It led to the establishment of elected local and provincial assemblies, with the latter acquiring significant responsibilities both for spending and raising tax revenue. Thus it was an example of democracy, i.e. the election of representative bodies, imposing itself from below, albeit initially on the basis of a quite limited franchise. Indeed, although the movement received some encouragement from the bureaucracy in Peking in the hope that it would deflect demands for a national assembly and a government responsible to it, this hope proved vain, for members of the provincial assemblies increasingly took advantage of their position to speak out on affairs of the nation. Pressure built up so that the first National Assembly met in October 1910.

All these events are presented in great detail with considerable use of Chinese archives, and this is perhaps the chief merit of the work. Given all this detail, it is a pity that the writing is not always as clear as it might be and that the book lacks the index which its dustcover advertises. Both these defects will make the book more difficult for students to use. Nevertheless, it is a work that will repay careful reading, and it is particularly interesting for its account of the vitality of province-level politics and of the high degree of autonomy granted to provincial authorities under the Qing dynasty. Not only is this theme of provincial politics sometimes neglected in works on modern China, it also points to significant differences between, for example, the administration of the Chinese and Russian autocracies. The latter, despite its greater territorial size, aimed at a much higher degree of central control. The former, as this book reminds us, pursued something of a *laissez-faire* policy towards its provinces, attempt-